



Planning a tree planting project

Planting trees or woodland can be a relatively easy, community-focused and extremely rewarding way of helping local wildlife, although it must be done properly and with care. The success of planting will depend on choosing the right tree for the right place, and on the ongoing care you provide to ensure your trees thrive.

This advice sheet is designed to give some general recommendations on what to consider before you plant and assumes that the primary objective is to manage the land for the purposes of nature recovery.

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Why plant trees?

Trees provide homes for wildlife, shelter from the elements, secure passage across our landscapes and food sources for a wide range of species. They can capture carbon, protect and provide strength and structure for our soils, help reduce flooding and contribute to mitigating against air pollution.

Woodland is estimated to cover 13% of the UK, but this is not enough and much of our woodland cover is non-native plantations which have limited value for wildlife. The UK is one of the least wooded nations in Europe, due to multiple factors such as agriculture, infrastructure and other land changes. The loss of our trees and woodlands has in some places, been devastating for dependent species, or wildlife which travels through wildlife corridors created by areas of woodland. We need to work harder to restore these vital wildlife habitats.

Planning for planting

Before embarking on your tree planting, it is a good idea to think about why you are planting trees and what you hope to achieve. Do you want to create habitat for a specific local species of plant or butterfly? Are you hoping to alleviate local flood potential? Or perhaps it's more important to create a space where the community can enjoy nature?

Should trees be planted at all? There are many reasons why trees may not be appropriate for the site or natural regeneration may be a better approach.

Think carefully about your objectives before you begin, and create a plan for your site, defining the objectives and management from the beginning. Trees should not be planted if aftercare cannot be guaranteed, so consider carefully if you have the time and money to make your investment worthwhile and write your woodland management plan in advance. For woodland to have the greatest benefit for wildlife, management 10-20 years down the line is just as important as getting the trees established! As a minimum you should expect:

Before you begin: plan, plan plan!

Year 1: order tree well in advance, planting, tree protection, mulching (if appropriate) and watering in drought conditions.

Year 2: weeding, mulching (if appropriate) and watering in drought conditions.

Years 2-5: expect to replace a proportion of whips particularly during drought years.

Year 5-8: guard removal (if not biodegradable), replacement planting.

Year 10+: woodland management, laying, enhancing, further understory planting.

Tree planting won't instantly result in the creation of a 'woodland', this requires ongoing management and care over a significant period of time. Depending on your site and objectives woodland main not be the end goal, perhaps a new hedgerow, orchard, wood pasture or food forest is the most appropriate project for your site.

Right tree, right place

Trees are a hugely important part of our ecology but tree coverage isn't appropriate for all areas, and the most beneficial choice of species will vary from place to place. Because place is just as important as species, Somerset Wildlife Trust never recommend holding 'tree give aways', as even native species can be detrimental if planted in an inappropriate habitat.

Is the site already valuable wildlife habitat such as species-rich grassland, wildflower meadow, heathland, wetland or bog? These precious wildlife-rich habitats already store carbon and planting trees on them can dry them out and cast shade, resulting in a net loss of wildlife value and releasing more carbon than it sequesters. Before you begin planting ensure you have landowner permission and have assessed the existing ecology of the site.

Could natural regeneration be more effective? Allowing natural regeneration on sites that are adjacent or near to existing woodlands is more likely to result in more resilient and biologically diverse woodland habitat as the tree species will be locally adapted. A naturally regenerating woodland is also likely to develop a more natural structure and support a wider range of wildlife.

But if planting is the way forward and it is the right place, be sure to plant the right tree! Tree species that naturally suit the site will establish easily and grow quickly – the best guide to species that suit the soil is to look at what's growing nearby. Sourcing seeds from surrounding areas will ensure your trees are of local provenance, but if this isn't possible make sure you buy native tree species grown as locally as possible, that are suitable for the soil type and pH. For example, rowan will struggle in the heavy clay in Taunton but thrive on the light acidic soils of the Quantocks. It's also important to choose a variety of appropriate trees to give good structure to your future woodland. A mix of species that will grow into large 'standards', as well as species that will create a shrubby understory, will provide the most benefits for wildlife.



Nature Recovery Networks in Somerset

Nature Recovery Networks are linked corridors of environmentally rich habitat that allow plants and animals to thrive, spread and adapt to change. Somerset is one of the least wooded counties in the UK due to a combination of both extensive removal for the development of agriculture and large areas of low-lying wetland habitat unsuitable for woodland. However, we also have significant areas of biodiverse woodlands, in particular the Atlantic rainforests of the Quantocks and Exmoor, and broadleaf woodland and hazel coppice in the Blackdown, Polden and Mendip Hills. 75% of Somerset is managed for agriculture, but even in these areas tree species are present in the form of hedgerows and our famous orchards.

Somerset is also a county that has suffered enormously due to the impact of Ash Dieback, which in some areas of the Mendips will result in losses of 80% of woodland cover. Much of Somerset is low lying and increasingly experiencing extreme flooding events, so it's even more important that we restore tree coverage in appropriate areas that will help slow the flow.

We need to connect healthy areas of woodland habitat, as well as restore areas in which woodland has been lost or degraded. Through a mix of natural regeneration and well-planned planting across the county, together we can restore a robust and resilient Nature Recovery Network

Practicalities of planting

Kit list: Spade (ideally tree planting spade); thick bin liners; work gloves; first aid kit and lots of tea and biscuits!

Trees are most commonly planted as bare root whips. These are trees between 1-3 years old which have a mass of roots and will establish quicker than older plants. Ensure you have enough people to help before ordering or uprooting your trees. Expect experienced volunteers to be able to plant about 50-75 notch-planted whips a day if fitted with tree guards. Children and inexperienced volunteers will take considerably longer.

Bare root trees need to be planted when they are dormant – before they have begun to leaf – or the stress can kill them. Planting season usually runs from November – February in the South West. You should never plant into frozen ground and care must be taken to keep the roots protected at all times. Use a bin-liner to protect the fine root hairs which can be damaged by even a short exposure to wind.

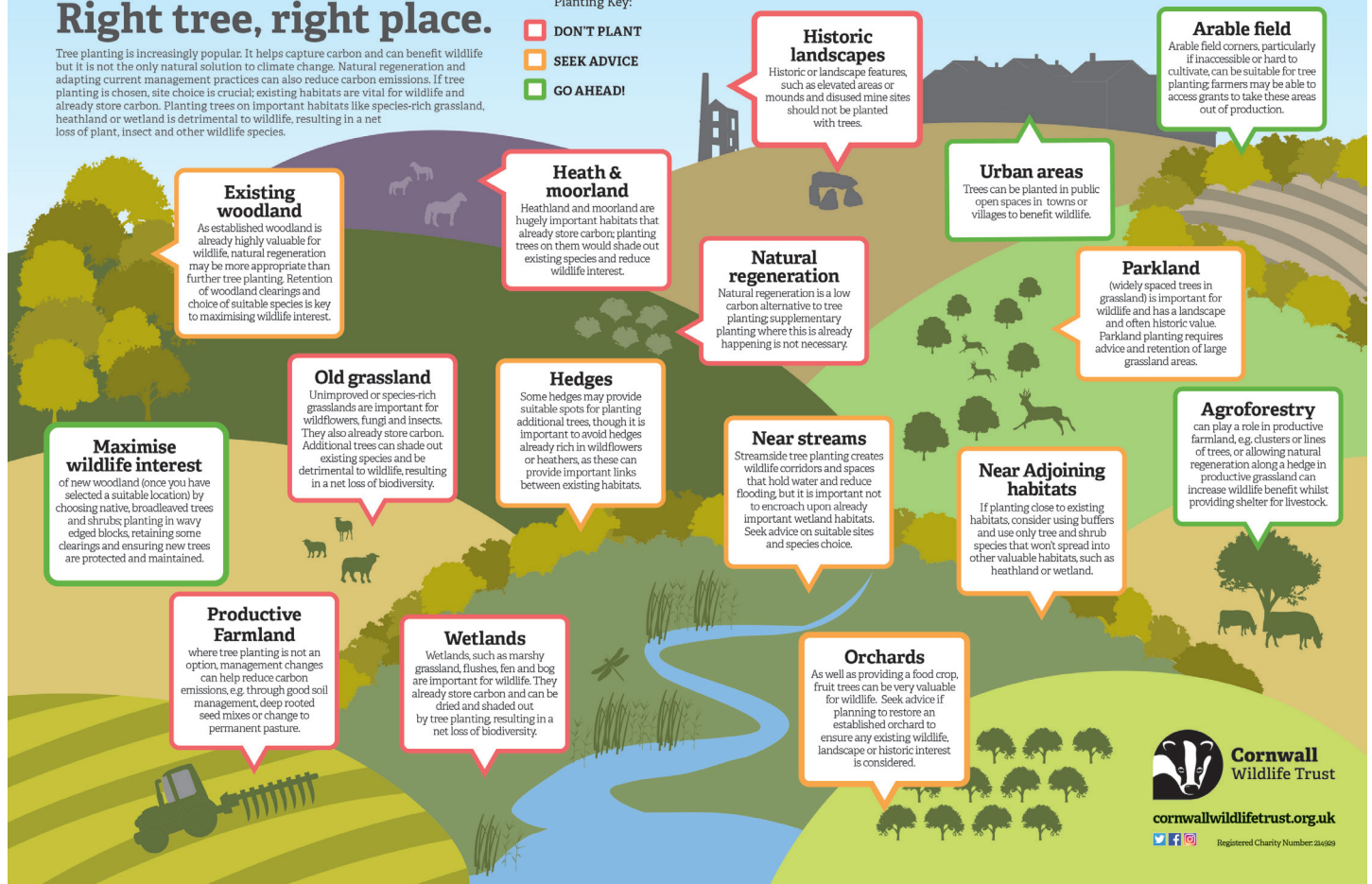
Work in a pair for the best results. One person measures the spacing, cuts the notch and holds it open with the spade, while the other person quickly transfers the plant

Right tree, right place.

Tree planting is increasingly popular. It helps capture carbon and can benefit wildlife but it is not the only natural solution to climate change. Natural regeneration and adapting current management practices can also reduce carbon emissions. If tree planting is chosen, site choice is crucial; existing habitats are vital for wildlife and already store carbon. Planting trees on important habitats like species-rich grassland, heathland or wetland is detrimental to wildlife, resulting in a net loss of plant, insect and other wildlife species.

Planting Key:

- DON'T PLANT
- SEEK ADVICE
- GO AHEAD!



Cornwall Wildlife Trust

cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 24629

It's important to consider if your site is suitable before ordering your trees. With thanks to Cornwall Wildlife Trust. cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-doour-conservation-workon-land/tree-planting

from the bag to the notch. Make sure the roots are all underground before heeling the notch closed, being careful not to leave cracks where water could seep in and freeze – killing the roots.

Mulching using woodchip or natural mulch at the base of your trees can improve the soil texture and protect the fragile root systems. Make sure you do not use a peat-based mulch. Cardboard cut outs can be very effective and make use of a waste material but require a bit of prep in advance! However, mulch isn't always appropriate on more sensitive sites so ensure you research this before investing.

In many areas of Somerset deer populations are high so you will need to protect your young trees with guards or fencing. There are an increasing number of biodegradable guard options available on the market now. Although they may be slightly more expensive than standard plastic, it is well worth the investment both for the sake of the environment and to minimise ongoing clean-up efforts.



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Further references

For all other individual queries we ask that you submit an enquiry form through our website so we can best advise you.

somersetwildlife.org/what-we-do/professional-services/land-management-advice

Join our Team Wilder e-newsletter and Facebook group to access learning, resources and a network of like-minded people who can share knowledge and support.

Right Tree, right place in Somerset – article and webinar:
somersetwildlife.org/blog/tree-mendous-trees-planting-right-tree-right-place

TCV Tree planting and aftercare (subscription needed): conservationhandbooks.com

Woodland Trust provide step-by-step advice to tree planting, as well as grants and UK providence tree packs: woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/advice

Woodland Trust provide a 'Woodland Creation Guide' for larger projects, available as a download: woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/woodland-creation-guide

Reimagining the Levels provide practical support, advice and grant opportunities for planting projects on and around the levels: reimaginingthelevels.org.uk

Orchard Practical Guide from PTES includes guidance on planting, restoring and managing orchards: ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/orchard-practical-guides

